

University of Richmond UR Scholarship Repository

Honors Theses

Student Research

1971

Senator William E. Borah's dry campaign : its effect on the presidential election of 1928

Emily White Zehmer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses>

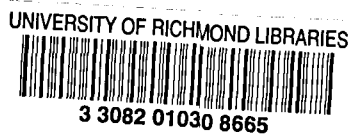
 Part of the [Political History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zehmer, Emily White, "Senator William E. Borah's dry campaign : its effect on the presidential election of 1928" (1971). *Honors Theses*. 1081.

<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1081>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.



SENATOR WILLIAM E. BORAH'S DRY CAMPAIGN:
ITS EFFECT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1928

THESIS

For

Dr. Frances Gregory

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement of the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

University of Richmond

Emily White Zehmer

1971

SENATOR WILLIAM E. BORAH'S DRY CAMPAIGN:
ITS EFFECT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1928

Emily W. Zehmer
April 21, 1971

Senator William E. Borah's Dry Campaign:
Its Effect on the Presidential Election of 1928

Like many of its predecessors, the campaign for the Presidency of the United States in 1928 began months before candidates were nominated and ballots were cast. The Republican Party found itself without a candidate when President Coolidge announced late in the summer of 1927 that he would not seek re-election in the following year. There was a slight scramble within Republican ranks for the nomination. Among those considered were Senator Charles G. Curtis of Kansas, majority floor leader, who subsequently was elected Vice-President; Senator William E. Borah, the Idaho Progressive whose role in the campaign is explored herein; Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University; the Coolidge Administration's Vice-President, Charles G. Dawes; and the rugged individualist of considerable experience, Herbert C. Hoover, Secretary of Commerce since 1920. Hoover's pre-convention campaign was evidently the most efficient, and by early spring of that election year, although there had been some sentiment to draft Coolidge, the Secretary's nomination was a certainty.¹ Similarly, long before the Democrats met in Houston, Texas for their National Convention, the

choice of Alfred E. Smith, Governor of New York, was a preclusion. Four years earlier, Smith and William G. McAdoo, contending for the nomination, had split the Democratic Party along Protestant and Catholic, Northern and Southern, and dry and wet lines. forcing the delegates to compromise by naming John W. Davis, a Wall Street lawyer whose views were remarkably Republican in sentiment. The election of 1924 had left the Democratic organization in shambles, except in New York, where Smith had been re-elected Governor for a third term, amassing three million more votes than Davis. ²

With their nominees all but chosen in advance, it was therefore the primary function of the national party conventions to construct presidential platforms. The Prohibition question, seems to have been the campaign issue upon which the parties offered the only outstanding choice. The election of 1928 was therefore a referendum in this sense, and, in light of the evidence presented in this paper, made so through the tireless efforts of Senator William E. Borah.

The conversion ^{to} ~~of~~ Prohibition after the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution ³ in 1920 was relatively easy, due to the fact that the sale of hard liquor had been severely restricted during

the First World War, and many state governments had already adapted dry legislation. By the mid-twenties, however, in both wet and dry camps, there was considerable dissatisfaction with the results of national administration. The Volstead Act, which provided the definition of intoxicating liquor as prohibited by the Amendment, had failed to accomplish its purpose, for bootleggers could easily re-interpret it, however illegally, to their advantage. The Prohibition Bureau, a division of the Office of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue was putty in the hands of political manipulators.⁴ Not until it became an independent agency in 1927 were its agents subject to civil service requirements. In addition, Senator James B. Reed of Missouri, himself a wet, had uncovered unsavory political dealings in Pennsylvania and Indiana, implicating the two most respected dry and wet lobbies, the Anti-Saloon League and the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment. Reed was the leader of the vocal wet minority in Congress, whose number substantially increased after his report was released in 1926.⁵ Furthermore, the Report of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America revealed the divisions among churchgoers over the issue, bluntly stating that a large majority of the American people opposed the Eighteenth Amendment. The Anti-Saloon League exerted enough pressure so that this report was revised in favor of Prohibition.⁶

Nevertheless, the original was widely publicized, and the most stalwart of the drys, Bishop J. D. Cannon, has said of it that, "No document had ever been printed which had been productive of more real harm to the cause of Prohibition." ⁷

Prior to the 1928 campaign, the action which provoked the most controversy between dry and wet forces was the referendum held in New York State in May of 1926. A million votes ⁸ favored the revision of the Volstead Act to the extent that states could determine for themselves the definition of intoxicating liquors. Four years earlier, New York had repealed its state enforcement law, leaving the "Concurrent Enforcement" section of the Eighteenth Amendment open to question. These events in New York, sanctioned by the State's politically promising, anti-Prohibitionist Governor Smith, and coupled with the disillusionment with Prohibition spreading throughout the country, forced the drys to rally. They found their leader and most able spokesman in Senator William E. Borah of Idaho, who, according to H. L. Mencken, "after long having been a professional Liberal, is now a professional Prohibitionist." ⁹

Senator Borah considered himself a man of principle rather than party. "They say I have been a Republican only during campaigns. Well, in campaigns parties are

proper and desirable. I haven't felt yet that I should go with the party against my convictions on questions of fundamental policy." ¹⁰ Although Borah himself was a teetotaler and fought for a national Prohibition Amendment as early as 1914, ¹¹ he would have nothing to do with the Anti-Saloon League. ¹² In his dry campaign, he concentrated not on the evils of liquor, which he assumed were obvious to his audiences, but on the constitutionality of the Eighteenth Amendment and the dangerous precedent repeal would set.

In the spring of 1926, when the New York proposals for revision of the Volstead Act captured the attention of the nation, Borah stepped forward as the guardian of the Constitution both in the Senate and out. His campaign to make prohibition a political factor in 1928 began ostensibly with a speech in Baltimore to a meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church on the thirtieth of May. Although he attacked liquor traffic as a "curse to humanity," Borah admitted that the greater question was

Shall we live up to and enforce that provision of the Constitution until in the orderly method pointed out by the Constitution we see fit to change it? Can we enforce the law which we have deliberately made?....To disregard our Constitution, to evade it, to nullify it, while still refusing to change it is to plant the seeds of destruction in the heart of the nation-- is

to confess before the world that we have
neither the moral courage nor the intellec- 13
tual sturdiness for self-government.

Borah reacted in this same speech to the New York
referendum with his nullification argument, which he reit-
erated many times prior to the November election of 1928.
In the dramatic language characteristic of his rhetorical
style, he stated

If this referendum interrogatory has any
meaning at all, it is that every state
shall determine for itself its own con-
struction and obligation to the Constitu-
tion of the United States, and that con-
struction is to bind the Federal Govern-
ment. That doctrine was shot to death at 14
the Battle of the Wilderness.

Moreover, in the Senator's address to the Presbyterian
General Assembly, he demanded that candidates for office
declare themselves on the Prohibition question because the
voters had a right to know where they stood. Throughout
the summer of 1926, Borah made this plea again and again.
In Augusta, Georgia, Borah was once more the speaker at a
religious conference, this time the Protestant Ministers
Association. "If neither of our political parties will
take a definite stand on the liquor question, then let the
people organize another party which will be loyal to the
Constitution of the United States," he suggested. 15
In an interview published in the Christian Advocate just
prior to his Augusta speech, Borah warned that unless

the Republican party as a party takes a position and puts its prestige behind enforcement, there will be no enforcement worthy of the name, merely skirmishing between the lines, always anxious of giving offense to the drys on one hand 16 and the wets on the other.

Senator Borah did not confine his speaking engagements to religiously oriented audiences who would be almost certain to share his viewpoint. He scored his most impressive and widely publicized Prohibitionist victory in a debate with Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler before the Roosevelt Club of Boston on April 8, 1927. A fellow Republican, Butler was nevertheless adamant in his arguments for repeal. The two debated the question, "Should the Republican national platform of 1928 advocate repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment?"

Both men agreed that the point was not a matter of wet as opposed to dry sentiment (Butler himself was not a drinker), but "a governmental question without the proper conception and solution of which there could be no orderly, regulated life for our people." 17

Taking the affirmative, Butler argued that the Eighteenth Amendment had no place in the Constitution. Rather, it was a

revolutionary act which has no likeness to anything in the Constitution, which has nothing whatever to do with the form

and structure of the Government or with the limitation of powers, but which is an ordinary municipal law, operating directly and almost irrevocably upon the whole body of our citizenship.... It is a question of State privileges, State duties, State responsibilities...of the protection and preservation of local self-government.

18

Butler favored a repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment and an adaptation of the Canadian system of state liquor control, which abolished private liquor traffic and the saloon, and allowed the sale of liquor in limited quantities for private use.

Senator Borah then stated his position; namely, that

It is the duty of every loyal citizen to uphold and maintain that Constitution until the people see fit in their wisdom to change it.... Eight years ago the American people deliberately outlawed intoxicating liquor for beverage purposes. ...The American people will never repeal the Eighteenth Amendment until its enforcement has had a fair trial. and it has never had a fair trial.

Borah went on with his nullification argument and called the proposals for modification of the Volstead Act "political expediency to enable candidates to get by the election without telling what their position is on the Eighteenth Amendment." As for repeal, Borah believed it would set a dangerous precedent and would result in the inevitable return of the saloon. He then directed a question to Dr. Butler's suggestion of state controlled Prohibition. "Do

you think the liquor traffic in this country would lie down, surrender, be good, and satisfy the law under government control? Not at all." Borah would direct the Republican Party to "declare for the Amendment and for its enforcement.... It will be time enough for the Republican Party to declare for repeal when the Republican Party has really tried to enforce it." ¹⁹

In rebuttal, Butler, quoting Borah's states' rights stand on women's suffrage by which the Senator had argued against the Nineteenth Amendment, asked why the same argument was not applicable to Prohibition. Borah replied, giving credence to the accusations of inconsistency made by his critics, ²⁰ that the States which wanted women's suffrage could have it without Constitutional amendment. Because wet states shipped liquor into dry ones, however, national laws were needed to enforce Prohibition. Butler then inquired if the wet states were not then deprived of their rights. Borah returned with the irrefutable logic that, "Wet states can ship wet into the dry states, but the dry states cannot ship dry into the wet." ²¹

According to Butler, ²² it was one of the conditions of the debate that there be no decision as to its outcome. Yet the event was so widely publicized that there were several sets of unofficial judges. Those representing the Boston Herald-- four wet, four dry, and one neutral--

gave the verdict to Senator Borah, ²³ as did the editors of the New York Times.²⁴ Commentators found similarities between the Butler-Borah contest and the Lincoln-Douglas debates on slavery. It was suggested that, like the slavery question, Prohibition be submitted to the voters in the form of a Presidential election, ²⁵ exactly as Borah intended.

After Coolidge's announcement that he would not run again, Borah's name appeared on the list of potential Republican candidates for 1928. Editorials in both wet and dry periodicals congratulated the Senator on his attempt and apparent success in projecting the enforcement of Prohibition into the Presidential campaign. The New Republic, albeit humorously, suggested that the election rest solely on the Prohibition issue, with Senator Borah and conservationist Gifford Pinchot on one ticket, opposed by Dr. Butler and H. L. Mencken on the other. ²⁶ There were more serious speculations that Borah would keep his promise made in Augusta, Georgia to organize a third party. According to some sources, Borah had the largest personal following of any man in American public life. As the nominee of a Prohibition party, he would be likely to carry the dry South and the liberal, Progressively oriented West whose favorite son he was. Borah, as a dry candidate, would therefore stand a good chance of election because the Democrat heir apparent, Smith and whomever the Republicans might

choose would split the Eastern vote.²⁷ There was also considerable support among the remains of La Follette's Progressive Party for Senator Borah's candidacy. Roy Kaig, the leader of this faction in Borah's native Idaho, hoped that Progressive support would strengthen the Senator's chances for the Republican nomination.²⁸

Despite the conjectures made concerning his motives, Borah himself was apparently indifferent to the idea of campaigning for the Presidential nomination. He preferred to be the power behind the convention, as indeed he proved to be. He allowed his name to be used to win the Progressives over to the Republican ranks, according to his biographer.²⁹ Furthermore, the national prominence his dry campaign had won for him gave him sufficient influence to write several planks of the Republican platform, including that concerned with Prohibition, and virtually, to name their candidate.

Borah began his search for a Republican candidate in February of 1928 in a highly unorthodox manner. In letters to each of the leading aspirants, he asked:

Do you favor incorporating a specific plank pledging the party to vigorous endorsement of the Eighteenth Amendment and laws enacted to carry it into effect?

What is your attitude and what would be your attitude toward the Amendment and its enforcement in case you are

nominated and elected?

Do you favor into law of the principle embodied in the New York referendum?

Do you favor repeal of the Eighteenth Amedment or of the Volstead Act? 30

The response which evidently brought the most satisfaction to Borah was that of Herbert Hoover. In a reply quoted often in the campaign and afterwards, Hoover stated that he did not favor repeal and that Prohibition was "a great social and economic experiment, noble in motive, far reaching in purpose. It must be worked out constructively." 31 These words revealed a political cunning in Hoover's nature; he had left himself open for revision short of repeal, thereby totally alienating neither drys nor wets. Hoover and Borah conferred often 32 in the spring of 1928, and it was understood that they agreed on important matters of policy and campaign strategy.

Borah, having skillfully maneuvered the Prohibition issue into the campaign limelight, was the author of the Republican Party's plank concerning it. Under the guise of "Law Enforcement," the section reiterated Borah's constitutional argument, buttressed with quotations from George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

We affirm the American Constitutional Doctrine as announced by George Washington in his Farewell Address, to wit:

"The Constitution which at any time exists until changed by the explicit and authentic act by the whole people is sacredly obligatory upon all."

We also reaffirm the attitude of the American people toward the Federal Constitution as declared by Abraham Lincoln:

"We are by both duty and inclination bound to stick by that Constitution in all its letter and spirit from beginning to end. I am for honest enforcement of the Constitution. Our safety, our liberty depends upon preserving the Constitution of the United States, as our forefathers made it inviolate."

The people, through the method provided by the Constitution have written the Eighteenth Amendment into the Constitution. The Republican Party pledges itself and its nominees to the observance and vigorous enforcement of this provision of the Constitution." 33

Despite Senator Borah's overwhelming influence at the Republican convention, his former adversary, Dr. Butler, attempted to introduce a proposal for repeal of the Prohibition Amendment. Although the Committee on Resolutions ignored it, they did allow him five minutes in which to read and support an amendment to the platform. Butler substituted for Borah's plank a declaration reaffirming the principles of the Republican Party as established in the 1860's, and asking for the earliest possible repeal

of the Eighteenth Amendment. Although Butler's proposal was voted down almost as quickly as it was read, he admitted later ³⁴ that the vote was much closer than he had expected. Nevertheless, Borah had once again over-ridden Butler, and it was the 1928 convention which definitely put the Republican Party on the side of the Amendment.

If Borah had forced the Prohibition issue, the Democrats had no choice but to make a stand. Prior to the campaign, although Al Smith was all but formally nominated, there was a split within Democratic ranks over the question. The division only increased when Smith made his views clear after he was officially their candidate. Senator Robert L. Owen of Oklahoma, a dry Democrat, recognized that the Republican Party was "attempting to use it[Prohibition] as a means of splitting our party." ³⁵ Yet William G. McAdoo, who had lost the nomination in 1924 because of his very adamancy on the question, welcomed the opportunity for his party to take a position. Agreeing with Senator Borah, McAdoo stated in an interview that, "This is the kind of question upon which parties that appeal for votes should have a policy, and above all, declare a policy." ³⁶

Deciding upon a policy, however, was another matter. Former Senator Oscar Underwood of Alabama felt that a

nominee favoring repeal would rally liberal forces in the country, even in the South. "There are many people in the South who recognize the evils of this thing [Prohibition], many others who do not favor constitutional Prohibition, and then there are just those who are regular in their party allegiance." ³⁷ Governor Albert C. Ritchie of Maryland, a wet, agreed with McAdoo, the Prohibitionist, that the issue was "something in which the American people are concerned above any or all political questions you might mention. I cannot see how we can evade it." ³⁸

The dry faction of the Democratic Party, however, was equally insistent. Edwin T. Marshall, Wilson's Secretary of Agriculture, declared that the Democrats needed the West to win in 1928.

Prohibition has been found not only good for the fireside but for the factory and the farm. The proof of the Prohibition pudding, as the West has experienced it, is in the economic eating. Any Democrat who does not stand four-square for Prohibition, not only for law enforcement, must abandon hope.... 39

Another dry, Senator Carter Glass of Virginia, was in favor of keeping the Prohibition question out of the election altogether. He upheld that the South would not reject Smith on Roman Catholic grounds. Virginia, after all, was the home of Thomas Jefferson, author of the state's Statute of Religious Freedom. Yet, if

Smith should run as a wet, he would be "badly beaten in Virginia, the South and the country." The Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act, Glass argued, were not enacted in response to any party declaration. The Democrats therefore had no obligation to transform them into party issues. Furthermore, the President alone could not change the Constitution or the Volstead Act. Therefore,

Why then commit a Democratic presidential candidate to a course which, if elected, he could little, if at all, effect; particularly when to do so would cause him to be rejected, if not bitterly repudiated by millions of voters in the surest Democratic States who might otherwise vote for him? 40

Senator Glass and the former Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, drafted the Democratic platform's plank concerning Prohibition. Like the Republican tenet, it was masked under the euphemism, "Law Enforcement." While echoing the constitutional argument set down by Senator Borah, the Democrats unabashedly blamed the Republican administrations for the increasing disrespect and disregard for the Amendment and its corollaries:

The Republican Party, for eight years in complete control of the government at Washington, presents the remarkable spectacle of feeling compelled in its national platform to promise obedience to a provision of the federal Constitution which it

has flagrantly disregarded and to apologize to the country for its failure to enforce laws enacted by the Congress of the United States. Speaking for the national Democracy, this convention pledges the Party and its nominees to an honest effort to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment and all the other provisions of the federal Constitution and all laws enacted pursuant thereto. 41

The Democrats, having compromised on the Prohibition question in favor of the drys, evidently hoped to straddle both sides of the issue by running a candidate whose past record was wet on a constitutionally argued, Prohibitionist platform. Smith, however, immediately made this position more awkward. Accepting his nomination by telegram, he stated that he was "known to support fundamental changes in the provisions for national Prohibition, based on the principles of Jeffersonian democracy," and that he felt it his duty to point the people of the country in that direction. 42 Thus, before the election campaign had actually begun, Senator Borah's introduction of the Prohibition question had hopelessly divided his Democratic opponents while rallying Progressives, Southerners, and Westerners to his own Republican dry cause.

The campaign itself, of just six weeks duration, was bitter and virulent. There was not as much emphasis on individual party platforms as there was on the personal habits and characteristics of the candidates themselves.

Smith and Hoover's diverse backgrounds lent themselves to obvious comparisons. Hoover, a Quaker born on an Iowa farm, became a successful engineer, whose personal fortune was reportedly worth four million dollars at the beginning of World War I.⁴³ The War increased Hoover's political fortunes substantially. He handled the repatriation of American citizens stranded in Europe, and later headed the Food Administration Office, which urged Prohibition as a means of conserving grain. Following the War, he had served eight years as Secretary of Commerce, and there he gained the title which was a virtual campaign slogan in 1928, "Architect of Prosperity." Prior to 1928, he had been engaged in many humanitarian efforts. According to Andrew Sinclair, the Presidential campaign elevated his rugged individualism and self-sufficiency to political philosophy.⁴⁴

Like Hoover, Alfred E. Smith was also a self-made man. Born of Irish immigrant parents on New York's lower East Side, he had worked his way up through New York politics via the Tammany Hall machine. Although his Tammany associations were a definite liability in national politics, his campaign advisors believed Smith's liberal record would overcome them.⁴⁵ His Catholicism was another matter. Anti-Catholic propaganda was rampant both prior to and during the campaign. Having foreseen religious prejudice

as a possible obstacle to the Presidency, Smith had replied in no uncertain terms to Protestant critics of his Catholicism in a response to an article appearing in the Atlantic Monthly in April of 1927. Later, the periodical published his reply:

...I recognize no power in the institution of my church to interfere with the operation of the Constitution of the United States or the enforcement of the law of the land. I believe in absolute freedom of conscience for all men, and in equality of all churches, all sects before the law as a matter of right. 46

It cannot be denied that Al Smith's views on prohibition provided a mask for the religious bigotry practiced by some American voters. Yet Richard Hofstadter, in a study conducted in 1960 when a Democratic Catholic successfully ran for President, concluded that religious bias was the deciding factor in only six states in 1928. If Smith had carried these states, all in the South, and even the few Northern states where his vote comprised more than forty-five per cent of the total, he still would not have had enough electoral votes to win. 47

During the campaign, Hoover repudiated all anti-Catholic sentiment. Senator Borah cancelled an engagement to speak at a Methodist ministers' conference in Peoria, Illinois on September 28, 1928, when a minister in attendance stated that Smith's candidacy should be denounced from every Protestant pulpit in the country. 48

It is perhaps more significant that Smith did not carry his native state in the Presidential election, although New Yorkers had had no qualms about sending a Catholic to the Governor's Mansion at Albany. There were other reasons why they and the voters in other states did not send Smith to the White House. Of these, the Democratic candidate's anti-Prohibitionist stand seems to have been the foremost. According to the Literary Digest, surveying the nation's editors just before Smith was nominated, "the one thing in a long and detailed discussion of campaign issues that will stick on the public from now till November" was Smith's plan for state liquor control.⁴⁹ As the campaign progressed, it was not Smith who made the issue so indelible, but Senator William Borah.

On September 20, 1928, Borah made the first of many stops on the campaign trail. His speech had been anticipated by the press to such an extent that it was something of a disappointment. "[Roaring] as gently as any suckling dove,"⁵⁰ Borah praised Hoover's experience and the eight years of Republican prosperity to a Detroit audience. In reference to the Prohibition question, he ridiculed Smith's acceptance speech and the Governor's denial in an Omaha speech that Prohibition was an issue. The Senator's sarcasm drew great laughter from a responsive audience.⁵¹

Borah's forensic ability evidently gained momentum as the campaign wore on. His speech in Minneapolis on the third of October was presented to an audience of twelve thousand in the auditorium, and was broadcast throughout the Midwest via radio. He criticized Smith for saying he would leave the question of the St. Lawrence Waterway to Congress, adding, "We'd better have an engineer for President." He defended Hoover on Smith's charges of corruption during Harding's administration with a caustic reference to Smith's Tammany associations. He reminded his rurally oriented audience once again of Smith's Eastern, urban background. The climax of his speech was effectively understated, interrupted by applause from the crowd. "Now, if it is not too late, I am going to say a word or two about Prohibition.... All those plans and schemes talked of... can accomplish but one thing, and that is the nullification, not the repeal, of the Eighteenth Amendment." 52

Later in the campaign, after his resounding success in the Middle West, Borah invaded the traditionally Democratic South. He was probably chosen to fight Hoover's battles here because of his states' rights record on the women's suffrage question and his controversial interpretation of the Fifteenth Amendment. Borah had supported the Southern conservatives' exclusion of Negro voters on

the grounds that state officials were in a better position to determine and set qualifications for suffrage than was the federal government. (It must be remembered that few of Borah's Idaho constituents were black men.) Indeed, *Claudius* Johnson has called the Senator the "greatest living exponent of states' rights."⁵³ In respect to Borah's nullification arguments, this evaluation is a paradox, but perhaps it is also a tribute to the Senator's political finesse.

In Dixie, Borah devoted his speeches to Prohibition, Tammany Hall, and Governor Smith's proposals to extend immigration quotas. Speaking in Charlotte, North Carolina, he put these questions to his audience, which responded to each with a resounding denial. "Does Governor Smith stand for anything North Carolina wants? Do you want Tammany Hall moved from New York to Washington, the repeal of Prohibition, and the letting down of immigration bars?"⁵⁴ Borah asked the same of audiences in Nashville, Chattanooga, and Richmond. When the returns were in, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee were only a fraction of those states in the Republican column.

The morning after the election, it was clear that all of the dire predictions made by Senator Glass, Senator Owen, and Secretary Marshall were true. Smith's percentage of the popular vote was substantially larger than

that obtained by his fellow Democrats in the two preceding Presidential campaigns.⁵⁵ Indeed, six million more votes had been cast for Smith than for any other Democratic candidate until that time, roughly 15,016,000 in all.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Smith's electoral vote tallied eighty-seven, compared with Hoover's four-hundred-forty-four, and Hoover's popular vote was an overwhelming 21,000,000 votes.⁵⁷

What was the decisive factor? Smith himself attributed his failure to win the election to his Catholicism and the economic prosperity which the Republicans claimed as a credit to themselves alone.⁵⁸ Yet Hofstadter has shown with substantial proof that Hoover won electoral victories resulting from anti-Catholic bias in only six states. Furthermore, Hofstadter contended that even a Protestant could not have beaten Hoover in 1928 because of the well established association of the Republican Party with the booming economy.⁵⁹ Prosperity, however, had been a factor in the 1924 election, and does not altogether explain the fact that Smith received seventy-five per cent more votes than had Davis.⁶⁰

Perhaps the most significant statistic of the 1928 election, with the exception of the electoral tally, was

the record number of voters who came to the polls. Seven million ⁶¹ more ballots were cast in 1928 than in 1924. Distributed somewhat differently, these seven million votes could have swung the election to Smith. The fact that he received only fifteen per cent of these "new votes" is proof that the Republican organization was well constructed. The engineer responsible for its construction was not the former professional who was elected President, but the professional Prohibitionist, William E. Borah, Senator from Idaho.

Senator Borah had introduced into the campaign its only actual issue; furthermore, he had persisted until his party had adopted his Prohibitionist viewpoint. He had taken over for Hoover on the campaign trail where Hoover's conservative views were not so popular. Borah's liberalism appealed to former Progressives who had bolted in 1924, and it brought them back into the Republican fold. It kept Republicans of similar mind who might have been tempted to vote for the liberal Smith from doing so. On the other hand, Borah's states' rights record attracted Southerners, who welcomed him more warmly than they did Hoover, and therefore voted for the Republican Prohibitionist stand with clearer consciences.

The Republican National Chairman, Will Hays, said after the election that Senator Borah, "exerted a greater influence upon the electorate than was ever before exercised by a human voice in a political campaign." ⁶² Mrs. Henry Peabody, Prohibition crusader of Massachusetts, agreed that Borah had led the campaign, and had rendered invaluable service to his country. ⁶³ From the evidence presented in this paper, it may well be concluded that Senator William E. Borah did more than any other man, with the possible exception of Herbert Hoover himself, to assure a Republican and Prohibitionist victory in 1928.

NOTES

¹ Karl Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, An Account of Party Politics During Twelve Republican Years: 1920-1932 (Boston, 1948), 246.

² Andrew Sinclair, Prohibition, The Era of Excess (Boston, 1962), 298.

³ U. S., Constitution, Amendment XVIII:

SECTION 1. After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

SECTION 2. The Congress and the several States shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

SECTION 3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the States by the Congress.

⁴ Sinclair, Era of Excess, 288.

⁵ Ibid., 350.

⁶ Ibid., quoting the Report, 291.

⁷ J. Cannon, Bishop Cannon's Own Story (Duke University, 1955), 357.

⁸ Claudius O. Johnson, Borah of Idaho (New York, 1936), quoting the New York referendum, 44.

⁹ Henry Lewis Mencken, "The Struggle Ahead" (December 5, 1927), reprinted in A Carnival of Buncombe, Malcom Moos, ed. (Baltimore, 1956), 147.

¹⁰ H. F. Pringle, "The Real Senator Borah," World's Work (November-December, 1928), LVII, 133.

¹¹ Johnson, Borah of Idaho, 177.

¹² Pringle, "The Real Senator Borah," 144.

¹³ New York Times, May 31, 1926.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Borah's New Dry Party," Literary Digest (July 31, 1926) XC, No. 5, 9.

¹⁶ Johnson, Borah of Idaho, quoting from the interview printed in the Christian Advocate (July 14, 1926), 415.

¹⁷ Nicholas Murray Butler, Across the Busy Years, Recollections and Reflections (New York, 1940), II, 340.

¹⁸ New York Times, April 9, 1927.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Pringle, "The Real Senator Borah," 133.

²¹ New York Times, April 9, 1927.

²² Butler, Busy Years, II, 340-341.

²³ "The Butler-Borah Debate on Prohibition," Literary Digest (April 23, 1927), XCIII, No. 4, 10.

²⁴ New York Times, April 11, 1927.

²⁵ "The Butler-Borah Debate," Outlook (April 20, 1927), CXLV, No. 16, 2.

²⁶ "Prohibition as an Issue," The New Republic (December 21, 1927), LIII, No. 681, 128.

- 27 "Dry Party," Lit. Dig., quoting Mark Sullivan, 9.
- 28 Johnson, Borah of Idaho, 417.
- 29 Ibid., 418.
- 30 Senator William E. Borah, Washington, D. C., to Herbert C. Hoover, Washington D. C., February 23, 1928, Ibid., 419.
- 31 Herbert C. Hoover, Washington, D. C., to Senator William E. Borah, Washington, D. C., February 25, 1928, Ibid., 420.
- 32 Ibid., 421.
- 33 Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, comp., National Party Platforms 1840-1960 (University of Illinois, 1961), 288.
- 34 Butler, Busy Years, 341.
- 35 "Will the Democrats Make Prohibition the Issue?" Literary Digest (October 15, 1927), XGV, No. 3, 7.
- 36 Ibid., 7-8.
- 37 Ibid., 8.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Senator Carter Glass, "Could Smith Be Elected? As a Catholic, Yes! As a Wet, No!" The American Review of Reviews (May, 1927) LXXV, No. 5, 477. Glass actually uses the Jeffersonian tradition to support his argument!
- 41 Porter and Johnson, Platforms, 276-277.
- 42 New York Times, September 22, 1928.
- 43 Sinclair, Era of Excess, 293.

- 44 Sinclair, Era of Excess, 293-294.
- 45 Schriftgiesser, Normalcy, 251.
- 46 Ibid., 252.
- 47 Richard Hofstadter, "Could a Protestant Have Beaten Hoover in 1928?" The Reporter (March 17, 1960), XXII, No. 6, el.
- 48 Johnson, Borah of Idaho, 428.
- 49 "Smith's Plan for State Liquor Control," Literary Digest (September 19, 1928), XCVIII, No. 9. 5.
- 50 "Borah's Debut." Outlook (October 3, 1928), CLVIII, No. 5, 893.
- 51 Johnson, Borah of Idaho, 425.
- 52 Ibid., 425-426. Also, New York Times, October 4, 1928.
- 53 Johnson, Borah of Idaho, 174.
- 54 Ibid., 498.
- 55 Hofstadter, "Protestant in 1928?", 33, gives Cox 34.1, Davis 28.8, and Smith 40 per cent of the total vote in 1920, 1924, and 1928. Similar figures were derived by Schriftgiesser, Normalcy, 261.
- 56 Hofstadter, "Protestant in 1928?", 33.
- 57 Schriftgiesser, Normalcy, 260.
- 58 Ibid., 261.
- 59 Hofstadter, "Protestant in 1928?", 33.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Schriftgiesser, Normalcy, 260.

62 Johnson, Borah of Idaho, 430.

63 Ibid., 408.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

Butler, Nicholas Murray, Across the Busy Years, Recollections and Reflections, 2v.. New York, 1940.

A very informative, although lengthy work, Dr. Butler's autobiography devotes a chapter to his views on Prohibition and his debate with Borah, whom he held in high esteem.

Cannon, J., Jr., Bishop Cannon's Own Story. Duke University, 1955.

Bishop Cannon's devotion to the Prohibition cause is thoroughly discussed in his book, and provides an insight into the Southern Protestant mind and the issue. It was valuable background reading for this paper, although not necessarily pertinent to Senator Borah.

Current History, XXIX (September, 1928-April, 1929).

Various articles written prior to and after the election were interesting, although most were too short to be of any great help.

Glass, Carter, "Could Smith Be Elected? As a Catholic, Yes! As a Wet, No!" The American Review of Reviews, LXXV, No. 5 (May, 1927), 477-479.

Glass's article proves to be a prelude to the Democratic platform plank on Prohibition. He prophesies Smith's defeat quite accurately, and apparently, with little regret.

Johnson, Claudius O., Borah of Idaho. New York, 1936.

Johnson, according to his preface, was given access to the Senator's private papers in order to write this biography, which was published four years before the Senator's death. Although he is evidently an admirer of Borah, Johnson writes objectively.

Literary Digest, 1926-1928.

This particular news magazine was a valuable source of quotations from various smaller newspapers around the

country. Its coverage of the Butler-Borah debate was most complete, containing practically the entire text.

"March of Events," World's Work, LVIII, (November-December, 1928), No. 2, 117-118.

In its analysis of the election, World's Work concludes that the Democratic and Republican platforms were not decisively different. Rather, the question turned on Prohibition, as this paper proposes, and Hoover had the good fortune to take the most popular stand.

Mencken, Henry Lewis, A Carnival of Buncombe. Malcom Moos, ed. Baltimore, 1956.

This is a collection of Mencken's articles composed from 1920 through 1932. Mencken rarely mentions Borah, but heaps scorn upon him when he does. As a staunch supporter of Smith, Mencken devotes many words of praise to him.

New York Times, 1926-1928.

The flamboyant Senator Borah provided front page copy for the New York Times during this period, and therefore the paper was an invaluable primary source.

The Outlook, 1926-1928.

Decidedly Republican and Prohibitionist, this periodical devoted much space to Senator Borah's dry campaign.

Porter, Kirk H. and Donald Bruce Johnson, compilers, National Party Platforms, 1840-1960. University of Illinois, 1961.

Porter and Johnson have collected the Presidential Platforms of every major and significant minor party during period. There are no editorial comments.

"Prohibition as an Issue," The New Republic, LIII, (1927) No. 681, 128-129.

This editorial in the wet, pro-Smith journal congratulates Senator Borah on bringing Prohibition into the campaign, and is proof of the high regard felt by both wet and dry forces for the Senator.

B. SECONDARY SOURCES

Hofstadter, Richard, "Could a Protestant Have Beaten Hoover in 1928?", The Reporter, XXII (1960), No. 6, 31-33.

Hofstadter concludes that it was the economic prosperity of 1920-1928 which defeated Smith. Prohibition, he believes, was the Democrat's only issue, and it lost him more votes than it gained. His work is helpful in its statistical analysis of the election.

Mertz, Charles, The Dry Decade. New York, 1931.

Written in the waning years of Prohibition and devoting considerable space to Senator Borah's speeches, Mertz's book was extremely good in its evaluation of Borah's role from an anti-Prohibitionist viewpoint.

Pringle, H. F., "The Real Senator Borah," World's Work, LVIII (November-December, 1928), No. 2, 133-144.

Pringle does not seem to take Borah seriously; his article has the flavor of a caricature. It was published just after the 1928 campaign, but does not emphasize the Senator's role therein.

Schriftgiesser, Karl, This Was Normalcy; An Account of Party Politics During Twelve Republican Years, 1920-32. Boston, 1948.

Schriftgiesser admits his liberal tendencies in the forward of his book; nevertheless his coverage is solid. Although there is little reference to Senator Borah, the book contains illuminating portraits of Smith and Hoover.

Sinclair, Andrew, Prohibition, The Era of Excess. Boston, 1962.

Sinclair has perhaps written the definitive work on the Prohibition era. His book is as entertaining as it is informative, and surveys the issue from its nineteenth century origins through the Repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.